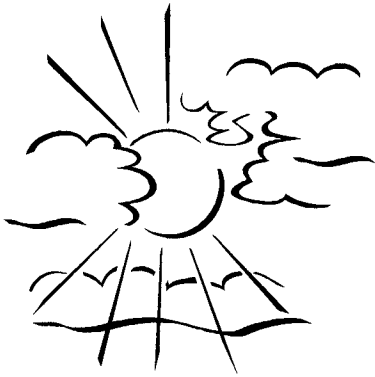


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, October 4, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

TOPIC	PAGE
*Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-6
*Domestic Violence	7-12
Juvenile Justice	13-15
Foster Care	16-18
Health Care	19-21
Elder Abuse	22-23
Energy Assistance	24-26
Food Assistance	27-28
Charities	29-32
Same-Sex Benefits	33-36

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 3, 2005

Contact: Heidi Hansen

517-335-6397

Governor Signs Legislation to Help Protect Children

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today signed legislation that will allow citizens to help support the Children's Trust Fund, a nonprofit organization run by the Department of Human Services (DHS) dedicated to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. The legislation reinstates the income tax check-off that allows taxpayers to donate to the fund.

"Michigan's children are our greatest resource," said Granholm. "I am proud to sign legislation that will allow every citizen to join in the fight to protect and nurture them." From 1983 until 2000, Michigan taxpayers had the opportunity to donate \$2 on their income tax return to support the Children's Trust Fund. The check-off had to be discontinued after 2000, because the trust fund balance reached \$20 million. Since that time, only the fund's interest and investment earnings have been disbursed. However, a continuing recession and lackluster stock market have resulted in lower earnings than anticipated, making a new check-off option necessary to continue providing adequate support to Michigan's children.

Public Act 160 allows a taxpayer to dedicate a portion of his or her refund or tax liability to the Children's Trust Fund. It also removes the \$20 million cap on the trust fund allowing additional revenues to be made available for children protection programs. "The generosity of Michigan's citizens is unparalleled," said Granholm. "I know this legislation will result in significant support for programs that help protect our children from abuse and neglect."

Senate Bill 503 was sponsored by Senator Bev Hammerstrom (R-Temperance).
#

MIRS

October 3, 2005

Granholt Signs Children's Trust Fund Bill

Taxpayers will be able to designate \$5 of their Michigan Income Tax return refund to the Children's Trust Fund under legislation signed into law today by Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM**.

The legislation, SB 0503, sponsored by Sen. Bev **HAMMERSTROM** (R-Temperance), would change the law that allowed residents to donate \$2 of their refund to the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) up until the CTF exceeded a \$20 million balance — something that occurred in 2000.

"Michigan's children are our greatest resource," said Granholt. "I am proud to sign legislation that will allow every citizen to join in the fight to protect and nurture them."

Between 1983 and 2000 when the \$2 CTF check-off was in effect, 2.2 million returns generated \$14.8 million for the fund. According to Granholt, a continuing recession and lackluster stockmarket have made the return of the check-off necessary. Under SB 0503, now PA 160, the check-off will return for tax years beginning January 1, 2005. The \$20 million balance limitation has been scratched from the books.

"The generosity of Michigan's citizens is unparalleled," said Granholt. "I know this legislation will result in significant support for programs that help protect our children from abuse and neglect."

Michigan Report

October 3, 2005

GRANHOLM SIGNS CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND BILL

Those paying income taxes in the state will once again have the option to donate to the Children's Trust Fund under legislation signed Monday by Governor Jennifer Granholm.

Under the legislation (SB 503, PA 160), income tax forms will carry a \$2 check-off that would provide revenue to the trust fund. The fund, run by the Department of Human Services, provides money to programs aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect.

The check-off, originally implemented in 1983, expired in 2000 when the trust fund hit \$20 million. The recent economic slump required the fund to spend some of its principle as well as interest earnings.

Tuesday, October 4, 2005

Sex offender sentenced to 15 to 30 years

Trace Christenson

The Battle Creek Enquirer

A Battle Creek man was sentenced to prison Monday for having sex with a 12-year-old runaway last Christmas.

Milo Burton, 37, was sentenced Monday to 15 to 30 years in prison by Calhoun County Circuit Court Judge Stephen Miller.

Burton pleaded guilty in September to charges he had sex with the girl, who was staying at his South McKinley Avenue house after she left home.

Burton told Miller he had nothing to say before he was sentenced.

Burton's plea came a day before he was scheduled to stand trial on two counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, delivery of marijuana and gross indecency.

He faced up to life in prison if convicted. In exchange for his plea, prosecutors agreed to drop the other charges and Burton was to receive a minimum sentence of 15 years in prison.

Burton was one of three people charged after Battle Creek police said the girl spent several days in Burton's home and said she was smoking marijuana, drinking alcohol and having sex.

Burton admitted that he had sex with the girl. The Enquirer does not identify victims of sexual assault.

Burton's wife, Julia, 34, pleaded no contest to aiding and abetting in a first-degree criminal sexual case and was to testify against her husband.

As part of her plea agreement, she was sentenced to four years and two months to 20 years by Circuit Judge Conrad Sindt on charges of aiding and abetting first-degree criminal sexual conduct of the 12-year-old girl and providing drugs to a 14-year-old girl.

A third man, an attendant at a nearby gasoline station, was acquitted in July by a circuit court jury on charges he paid to have sex with the girl.

Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com

Ex-Chelsea worker facing porn charges

Daniel Rosentreter left his job as water superintendent in March 2004

Tuesday, October 4, 2005

BY CHONG W. PYEN

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

A former Chelsea city official is expected to surrender to authorities this week to face criminal charges stemming from what police say was illegal possession of child pornography on a city computer.

A criminal warrant has been issued for Daniel Rosentreter, who resigned last year as Chelsea's water superintendent, on 20 felony counts, said Det. Sgt. James Bundshuh of the Michigan State Police post in Ypsilanti Township.

Rosentreter is expected to turn himself in for arraignment in the 14th District Court sometime this week, Bundshuh said.

The charges include possession of child pornography and use of a computer in a crime, all felony counts each carrying up to four to 10 years in prison, Bundshuh said.

Rosentreter, a 29-year Chelsea employee, left his job in March 2004 after an investigation by the city uncovered the pornographic material on his city computer, officials said.

Chelsea City Manager Michael Steklac said city police initially took the case, but it was later turned over to the state police because the case involved a city employee and the state agency has more resources and expertise to investigate computer-related offenses. Steklac replaced Rosentreter with Robert W. Jones II as water superintendent earlier this year.

A co-worker of Rosentreter discovered the child pornography material on the city computer in early 2004, triggering an internal investigation, the city manager said. "Clearly, it was a misuse of city equipment," said Steklac, adding that Rosentreter was given a chance to resign and accepted the offer.

Rosentreter, a resident of Jackson County, could not be reached for comment.

Chong W. Pyen can be reached at cpyen@annarbornews.com or (734) 994-6828.

Husband accused of beating wife to death

Tuesday, October 04, 2005

By Ken Kolker
The Grand Rapids Press

GRANT -- A husband accused of beating his wife to death is known to neighbors as a friendly man who liked to work outdoors, while the victim rarely was seen outside.

Richard May, 58, was arraigned Monday in Newaygo County District Court on a charge of open murder in the death of his wife, Margie May, 57.

May called police about 7 p.m. Saturday to report his wife was dead.

When state police troopers arrived at the small home, 3792 W. 116th St., they found her body in the cluttered yard.

An autopsy found she died of "blunt force trauma" to the head with a tool, said state police Detective Sgt. Richard Miller. Police said they seized the suspected murder weapon but did not provide details.

Police refused to disclose a possible motive. Troopers said they were not aware of a history of domestic-violence calls at the home in the sparsely populated area west of Grant.

Richard May was convicted in the 1970s for burglary and illegal entry in Manistee County, but police said they weren't aware of any criminal record since then.

He and a brother took turns living in the home since at least the late 1980s, said neighbor Diana Soderstrom.

About three years ago, his brother moved out, allowing Richard May and his wife to move in, she said. Police said the couple married about five years ago, living at first in northern Newaygo County.

Richard May, who was unemployed, often worked in the yard, Soderstrom said.

"He was friendly, jovial," she said. "He worked with wood. He was just a putterer."

Soderstrom said she saw his wife just once, walking to the house from a car. She said she never noticed any commotion there. "No raised voices, no anything," she said.

Richard May was ordered held in the Newaygo County Jail on a \$100,000 cash bond.

Man faces charges in stabbing, sex assault

Tuesday, October 04, 2005

By Lisa Medendorp

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Muskegon Heights police were expected to seek a warrant today for a 42-year-old man who allegedly abducted his ex-girlfriend from her home on Sixth Street after stabbing a neighbor he found inside the residence early Monday.

Interim Police Chief Clifton Johnson said that after the stabbing, the suspect forced the woman into a semi-truck owned by his employer and drove to an unknown location in rural Muskegon County. The suspect then allegedly raped her and beat her severely.

The stabbing victim, Torrey Day, 27, of 2125 Fifth, was reported in good condition today at Hackley Hospital, suffering from multiple stab wounds. Johnson said that after being stabbed, Day ran home and was taken to the hospital by family members.

The home where the incident occurred was across the alley from Day's home, according to police.

Officers said the suspect and the 30-year-old woman had a relationship for the past eight years. He lived with her until Saturday, "when she ended the relationship," said Detective Calvin Mahan.

Just before 12:30 a.m. Monday, the suspect knocked at the door on Sixth Street, Mahan said, and she told him to leave. "He forced his way in and punched her," he said.

Day was in her bedroom at the time, police said.

"The victim said after she was knocked to the floor, and as he (the suspect) went across the living room, she saw he had a knife in his hand," Mahan said. Police later recovered a folding knife believed to have been used in the stabbing.

The two men struggled and despite being wounded, Day, the bigger and younger man, was able to get out of the home and run to his residence.

Mahan said the woman then was forced to leave with the suspect in the semi-tractor truck. He made her lie in the cab's sleeper as they drove north on U.S. 31 out of town, Mahan said. She was not able to tell police exactly where they went.

Wherever it was they stopped, she was then beaten and sexually assaulted, according to police. She also sustained several superficial knife wounds. Police believe the suspect then drove her back to town and let her go somewhere close enough for her to walk home.

Mahan said officers working during the night -- Sgt. Shawn Stefanich along with Eugene Anderson, Marvin Petty and Bruce Morningstar -- "did a good job hunting down information and getting us in a position where we could make an arrest."

Police learned where the suspect's mother lived, which was on Dyson Street in Muskegon Heights, and discovered a semi-trailer parked in front. The company that owned the trailer -- the suspect's employer -- was contacted and information was put together sometime between 2:30 a.m. and 3 a.m. for a broadcast to area officers for the 2005 Freightliner truck.

At 5:15 a.m., Muskegon Officer Scott Vanderwier saw the semi-tractor truck with a trailer at Laketon Avenue and Seaway Drive, and pulled it over on Laketon near Division Street. The suspect, who had cuts on his hand from his own knife, had gone to work, police said.

About the same time, the woman "called dispatch from home requesting an ambulance," Mahan said.

She was taken to Mercy General Health Partners Mercy Campus, where she was listed in stable condition Monday morning and then later was released.

Johnson said there were children in the home at the time of the stabbing. They were not injured, and it was not clear if they saw what happened.

Woman faces trial in cooking-oil injury case

Tuesday, October 04, 2005

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS TOWNSHIP -- A woman accused of pouring hot cooking oil on her husband waived her probable-cause hearing Monday.

My-Hanh Thi Nguyen, 49, is charged with attempted murder in the Sept. 16 assault of her husband, Nhan Van Mail, in their house at 1445 Silver Springs Court SE in Gaines Township. He suffered burns to much of his body and remained hospitalized Monday in the burn unit at Spectrum Health Blodgett. Police said he was in stable condition.

Nguyen waived her hearing before Grand Rapids Township District Judge Sara Smolenski, who ordered the case bound over to Kent County Circuit Court. Assistant Prosecutor Kellee Koncki said she is negotiating a possible plea deal, but "there is not a specific offer on the table at this time."

Sheriff's detectives said the wife was upset over finances and her husband's relationships with other women when she heated up cooking oil and poured it on her husband, who was on the couch. They had argued while she cooked breakfast that morning, police said.

Nguyen is charged with assault with intent to murder, a potential life offense, and a 10-year assault charge.

Clemency sought for woman who killed husband

Sunday, October 2, 2005

Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette

ALLEGAN -- It has been more than 12 years since Kimberly Lundgren and her then boyfriend confessed to shooting her husband to death while he slept in the Lundgrens' Allegan County home.

Now an effort to gain clemency for Lundgren is drawing fire from county prosecutors who want her kept in prison.

Lundgren is one of 20 Michigan women imprisoned for their involvement in killing their husbands and whose cases are being championed by the Michigan Battered Women's Clemency Project. The Ann Arbor-based organization says these women were abused and their husbands were killed in self-defense. The group is holding a rally at noon Friday at the state Capitol in its efforts to have Gov. Jennifer Granholm grant the women clemency.

“(Lundgren) was a severely battered woman and she was peripherally, if at all, involved in ... (her husband's) death. She did not expect ... (her boyfriend) to kill her husband,” said Carol Jacobsen, the clemency project's coordinator.

But Margaret Bakker, Allegan County's chief assistant prosecutor, disagrees.

“She planned over a long period of time to kill her husband and her children,” Bakker said. “She admitted that and ... (the boyfriend) admitted that.”

Lundgren, now 45, pleaded no contest to second-degree murder and is in the Robert Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth, where she is serving a life sentence.

Her husband, James Lundgren, 42, was shot to death on July 30, 1993, shortly after Kimberly Lundgren's boyfriend, Dennis Leonard Jr., entered the Lundgrens' home in Fillmore Township with his .22-caliber revolver.

Kimberly Lundgren, then 33, and Leonard, then 19, both confessed to their involvement on the day of the murder, but authorities never determined who actually fired the shots.

County prosecutors believe the two planned to kill James Lundgren and the Lundgrens' two children, Morgan, then 3, and Mason, then 23 months, so that Leonard and Kimberly Lundgren could pursue their affair and cash in on a \$100,000 life insurance policy. The plan to kill the children was abandoned at the last minute, prosecutors said.

Leonard pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to 25 to 50 years in prison. In a 1994 interview, Lundgren told the Kalamazoo Gazette that she and her husband moved to Allegan County in the late 1980s in part to get a fresh start after several instances in which she was battered.

But she said the abuse continued. In one instance, Kimberly Lundgren called her father, who said he confronted his son-in-law. James Landenberger, who has since died, said his daughter's nose had been broken and quite a bit of her hair had been pulled out, according to Gazette archives. Still, Kimberly Lundgren said she declined to press charges and returned to her husband.

Bakker said in 1994 that Lundgren told police that her husband did not abuse her in the month before his death. Judge Harold Beach, who sentenced Lundgren, said at the time that he believed the abuse ended years before the murder and wasn't the motive for the shooting.

Jacobsen said Lundgren's conviction was typical for how the courts acted back then with these types of cases.

“These are cases that occurred at a time when there were no or few battered women's shelters, when police were not required by law to intervene or arrest batterers, and when prosecutors did not prosecute batterers,” Jacobsen said.

In its literature, the clemency project describes the Lundgren case this way: “Kim Lundgren's violent, drug addicted husband was killed by a man who thought he was protecting Kim. She survived her husband's terrible beatings and rapes for 10 years and was afraid he'd kill her. Her husband had never been arrested, even though he had physically assaulted her in the hospital. No issues of abuse were ever raised at her trial.”

Jacobsen said Lundgren supplied this information. Jacobsen said she has no evidence that James Lundgren was a drug addict or that he raped his wife. Jacobsen said the assault in the hospital involved James Lundgren's kicking his wife when she was in the hospital to give birth to Mason. Jacobsen said she never received documentation to confirm this.

Jacobsen said her belief that Leonard shot James Lundgren is based on a report made by firearms examiner David Balash during the investigation.

Balash looked at photos of Lundgren and determined that she could not have fired the gun because of how and where the gunpowder landed on one of her arms. But the report doesn't say whether the shower Lundgren took after the shooting would have affected the gunpowder.

The clemency project's literature also is incorrect in referring to Lundgren's trial. Because she pleaded no contest to the charges, no trial was ever held.

Judge takes tough stance rejecting killer's silence Teenage victim's family might learn 'Why?'

Ann Arbor News

Sunday, October 2, 2005

Imagine yourself as a parent who has learned that your child has been murdered.

Now think what it would be like to live the rest of your life without ever knowing why the murder took place.

And, wonder what it would be like to know that the defendant received a prison sentence less than called for by sentencing guidelines as part of a plea bargaining agreement.

Julia and John Coleman faced those thoughts last week when they sat in court and listened to a plea-bargaining agreement that would have allowed their son's killer, Ryan Bower, to go to prison without ever explaining why he pumped two shotgun blasts into their 16-year-old son, Jordan Coleman. As part of the agreement, Bower would have been sentenced to 10-15 years in prison.

Except for the tenacity of Washtenaw County Circuit Court Judge Donald Shelton, that nagging nightmare would have dogged the Colemans. Shelton last week refused to accept the sentencing part of the agreement because he still does not know why the crime took place. Bower maintains he has no recall of the killing.

Along with his family and attorney, Bower now must decide if he will agree to a review by an independent psychiatrist, withdraw the agreement, be sentenced without the agreement in place or, perhaps, present evidence about what happened when Coleman died.

Clearly, the pain of this incident stretches beyond the Colemans. Bower's family, too, will live with this tragedy for the rest of their lives.

Justice, of course, is imprecise, defined in many ways, and it often is elusive.

And, Shelton's path may lead to unexpected turns in the coming weeks or months.

Certainly, we're thankful that we do not have to decide on what is an appropriate sentence for the 17-year-old Bower, who was Coleman's friend and classmate at Pioneer High School.

Yet, everyone who believes in the rights of victims and their families should be glad that Shelton took this stance. In part, a legal proceeding is about closure, and that is less likely to happen if Bower remains silent.

Granholm vetos prison funds

October 4, 2005

BY SALLY BARBER, CADILLAC NEWS

BALDWIN - Gov. Jennifer Granholm's decision Friday to veto funding for the Michigan Youth Correctional Facility in Lake County is a devastating blow to the economic future of one of Michigan's poorest counties.

The veto ends the state's 20-year contract with the facility's management firm the GEO Group, Inc.

The largest employer in the county, the Florida-based GEO employed 229 workers at the maximum-security prison, accounting for \$9 million in wages and \$1 million in local taxes.

"We're very disappointed the governor didn't sit down with locals and look at the real numbers," said Rick Simonson, facility supporter.

"It's callous disregard for the people of this community who have been trying to lift themselves up," said Jim Truxton, Baldwin village president.

Loss of employment resulting from prison closure is expected to push Lake County's unemployment as high as 25 percent. With the loss of the county's major employer, economic development projects are stalled, including a \$2 million housing development, a major hotel, infrastructure improvements and a downtown renovation.

Area citizens initiated an intense lobbying effort last spring in hopes of keeping the facility open. In June, more than 500 people rallied to support facility funding.

"The community has done everything it can possibly do," Truxton said. "Now we'll have to deal with the aftermath. It's conceivable the township and county government could go into bankruptcy."

Lawmakers who worked on behalf of the community had harsh words for the governor.

"This is another instance of the governor going in the opposite direction of where she has said the state needs to go," said State Rep. Darwin Booher, R-Evart. "We all know Michigan needs jobs and her veto that closes the youth prison costs the surrounding communities more than 200 jobs."

Two-thirds of GEO's employees work in counties other than Lake County.

Sen. Michelle McManus, R-Lake Leelanau, condemned the governor for failing to consider alternatives to closing MYCF.

"This governor has been steadfast in her determination to close the Baldwin prison and eliminate the jobs and economic benefits it provides to Lake County and the surrounding area. Despite the outcry from the community and the hard work done by the legislature to find other savings in the Corrections budget, she refused to consider any alternatives. Even a projected bed shortage in the Michigan prison system was not enough to keep

her from closing this prison."

"This is just one more example of how the governor has turned her back on the residents of Northern Michigan. Now that she has taken this action, I challenge her to come to Lake County and explain her decision to the people

whose lives it affects. I think it's the least they deserve."

U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Holland, expressed concern for the governor's failure to regard 10 years of federal and state investment in Lake County and the example set by ending its contract with GEO.

"Eliminating the contract sends a disturbing message to businesses that might look to partner with Michigan in the future," he said.

The State Budget Office defended the governor's move. Closing MYCF is expected to save about \$17.8 million from the Department of Corrections \$1.88 billion budget.

"We found a significant budget shortfall in Michigan that forced us to make difficult choices," said Greg Bird, director of communications for the State Budget Office.

"These prisoners can be housed in alternative facilities at a savings to the taxpayer."

Legislature's proposed alternatives to eliminating MYCF funding were considered unrealistic. "It would force the department to make drastic cuts that would result in layoffs," according to a press release from the governor's office.

Prisoners now housed at MYCF will be transferred to facilities throughout the state.

Geo intends to keep workers employed as long as needed to transfer prisoners. Geo spokesperson Bill Nowling said some have been offered jobs at GEO facilities around the United States.

Historic foster-care center to close

October 4, 2005

BY EMILIA ASKARI and MELANIE D. SCOTT

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

One of the oldest and best-known foster-care agencies in the state, the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center in Farmington Hills, told employees Monday that it will be getting out of the foster-care and adoption business.

The decision means the center, which traces its roots back more than 150 years to downtown Detroit, also will stop housing children in trouble.

At a meeting Monday afternoon, board members decided it was no longer economically feasible for the center to continue as a residence for children who are removed from the care of their parents or legal guardians by a judge, said Gina Rozier, the center's director of agency relations.

In recent years, Rozier said, the need for such housing -- and the state dollars that come with it -- has decreased as judges try harder to find relatives or neighbors to care for children when their parents cannot. The center can house 60 children. Just 28 of those beds are in use, Rozier said.

She expects it will take several weeks to either place those children in foster care or find another residential facility for them.

"This is a sad day," Rozier said. "We really want parents to understand that we're not going anywhere until we get our children placed."

Rozier said the board is considering ways to continue to serve children and families in crisis, such as through counseling and training programs. These activities likely would take place at a different, smaller location.

Since 1929, the center's historic buildings have occupied a picturesque, 80-acre site on 12 Mile near Inkster. The land and buildings are leased from the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, which founded the center.

Leaders of the order could not be reached Monday evening to comment on whether the choice piece of real estate would be put up for sale.

It is also unknown how many of the center's approximately 70 employees will lose their jobs.

In addition, the center currently oversees about 80 children who have been placed in foster care, providing counseling and other support services to the families and children.

Those cases soon will be transferred to the portfolio of another agency, said Elizabeth Carey, executive director of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families, a Lansing-based nonprofit that represents agencies such as the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center.

She said six other state agencies have dropped their foster-care and residential services over the past few years, also because of lagging money from the state. It's part of a national trend, Carey said.

"They're not making enough money on those service deliveries to maintain them," she said.

The center started when the Daughters of Charity, an organization of Catholic sisters, began giving food and shelter to Detroit's orphans. In recent years, however, the center has attracted some negative attention.

The 2003 beating death of 4-year-old Joshua Causey rocked the agency when criminal charges were filed against two of its foster-care workers who allegedly saw bruises on the boy but failed to report them.

Causey died of head trauma. His foster mother, Lynda Baker of Detroit, was convicted of manslaughter and is serving a 5- to 15-year sentence.

A case worker and her supervisor were charged with felony child abuse by former Wayne County Prosecutor Mike Duggan. A judge dismissed the charge but upheld misdemeanor charges against the women for not reporting the suspected abuse. After community service, the charges are expected to be dropped Oct. 12, but a civil suit is pending.

Contact **EMILIA ASKARI** at 248-351-3298 or askari@freepress.com.

How the closing will impact children, families

October 4, 2005

QUESTION: Why did this happen?

ANSWER: Judges are trying harder to place children from troubled households with relatives. This means fewer kids need to live in residential facilities at the center. In addition, when children are placed with relatives who are not licensed foster care givers, the relatives don't get any money from the state to care for the child. There also is no funding available for the agency that would check on that child and offer support services.

Q: What do I do if I'm a foster parent through the center?

RELATED CONTENT

- [Historic foster-care center to close](#)

A: Center employees want to reassure you that they will pass on your case to another agency. Employees are trying to contact all foster and birth parents by mail and phone. You can call the center for more information at 248-626-7527, ext. 3312.

Q: What's going to happen to the children who live at the center?

A: They either will be placed in foster homes, adopted or moved to another residential facility. The process likely will take several weeks.

Q: I'm trying to adopt through the center. Will this prolong my wait to get a child?

A: The center typically is trying to place special-needs children for adoption. If you are interested in adopting one of these children, call the center.

Q: What will happen to the 80 acres on which the center sits?

A: The land and historic buildings are owned by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. It is unknown whether the order will put the site up for sale.

Emilia Askari

U.S. misses the mark on health care

Time has come to reconsider a national insurance plan

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, we have an opportunity to construct something far more important than higher levees — a national health care system that looks less like a tightrope and more like a safety net.

A dozen years after Bill Clinton's health reform efforts were destroyed by the insurance industry's duplicity, it's worth trying again. The health care system is steadily becoming more gummed up in ways that are impossible to hide.

One of the bumper stickers attacking the Clinton plan read: "If You Like the Post Office, You'll Love National Health Insurance." That wouldn't work today: The Postal Service runs a system that is manifestly more rational and efficient than our health care system. For starters, imagine a postal system that refused to deliver letters to or from 45 million Americans — except on rare occasions, by ambulance.

"This is one of those fleeting opportunities where a catastrophe creates an opportunity to rebuild something better than before," says Dr. Irwin Redlener, president of the Children's Health Fund and associate dean of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University.



NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

In a sign of the growing disenchantment with our health system, 13,000 doctors have joined Physicians for a National Health Program, which lobbies for a single-payer government-financed health program.

There are four main problems with the existing system. First, it leaves out 45 million uninsured Americans, and their number is rising. Second, it is by far the most expensive in the world, costing 15% of our national income, yet our outcomes are awful — U.S. life expectancy is worse than Costa Rica's. Third, our business competitiveness is undermined when, for example, medical expenses add \$1,500 to the sticker of each General Motors car. Fourth, our system is catastrophically inefficient: According to a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, health administrative costs are \$1,059 per capita in the United States, and just \$307 in Canada.

A single-payer system would be most efficient but probably is not politically feasible at the moment. The smart new book "The Health Care Mess" suggests a variety of more gradual approaches that would face less opposition.

Whatever the mechanism, all children should be covered. It's a disgrace that we use public funds to save the lives of nonagenarians but not those of 9-year-olds. And kids are a bargain: per capita medical spending is \$1,525 for children younger than 5, and \$9,000 per person aged 65 to 74.

A second principle is that we should put less emphasis on curative medicine and more on public health and prevention — everything from preparing for avian flu to encouraging exercise. Sure, we can buy more "left ventricular assist devices," which cost \$210,000 per patient installed, or buy Erbitux for colon cancer, at \$17,000 per month of treatment. But as a wise new book, "Prescription for a Healthy Nation," argues, you get more bang for the buck when you promote healthier lifestyles — fighting obesity, cigarette smoking and the like.

Raising cigarette taxes saved far more American lives, for example, than an army of neurologists ever could. In the same spirit, I'd like to see a French-fry tax. And imagine the health gains if we banned potato chips and soda from schools.

Reforming the health system won't be easy. In the real world, poor kids don't see doctors not only because they're uninsured, but also because Mom doesn't have a car, can't easily get time off from work or doesn't speak English. Those are hard nuts to crack — but one reason to think that we can do better is that much of the world does better.

I've been thinking of health care partly because of something that happened when I was on vacation in August. My kids and I were stacking firewood for my parents on the Yamhill, Ore., farm where I grew up, when suddenly the 7-foot stack collapsed — on top of my youngest. She was knocked down and pinned, her face bleeding, under a pile of logs.

I had insurance, and a car to get to the emergency room — and in the end the logs (stained with blood) turned out to be in worse shape than my daughter. She's just fine. But that instant was heart-stopping in its terror — and the system routinely does fail such children in need.

Isn't it worth fighting one more time for reforms, so that we Americans can get health care every bit as good as Canada's?

NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF is a columnist for the *New York Times*. Write to him at the *New York Times* News Service, 229 W. 43rd St., New York, NY 10036.

Deciphering Medicare options

Saturday, October 01, 2005

By Kathleen Longcore
The Grand Rapids Press

People who are eligible for Medicare benefits need to look over their mail carefully beginning today.

Seventeen insurance companies are bursting from the starting gate in a race to capture Michigan's 1.5 million Medicare beneficiaries with new prescription drug plans.

Until now, all you had to do to get Medicare was call the Social Security office and turn 65. Everything else was automatic.

But with the federal government's Medicare Modernization Act passed two years ago, every eligible Medicare recipient must select a prescription drug plan before May 15, 2006. People also can opt to enroll in a privatized plan that takes the place of Medicare Parts A and B.

Companies have developed more than 100 products that they are allowed to advertise starting today. That means they have just six weeks to grab the attention of those on Medicare before the enrollment period starts Nov. 15.

State officials worry the deluge of mail will so confuse seniors they will not enroll at all.

"That's a lot of souls in the state to inform and get signed up in time," said Sharon Gire, director of the state's Offices of Services to the Aging. "There's a lot for Medicare beneficiaries to sort out.

"I urge people to open their mail and carefully read the information on each plan. I know we all get a lot of junk mail. But if it has something to do with Medicare, please read it carefully."

Gire and others were in Grand Rapids this week to kick off the major information and enrollment effort, which includes a blitz of TV spots.

Those who are eligible need to learn the details of each plan and "ask, ask, ask!" said Jo Murphy, program development coordinator at the Area Agency on Aging of West Michigan.

Before enrolling in any plan, beneficiaries should consider what drugs they are taking, what is covered if they live elsewhere for part of the year and the plan's cost, Murphy said. And then there are two ways to go:

Keep standard Medicare with supplemental insurance and add only a drug benefit plan.

Enroll in a privatized Medicare Advantage plan that includes Medicare Parts A and B and a drug benefit. But make sure your doctors are in the network and your prescriptions are covered.

Murphy said trained volunteers are being swamped with phone calls from seniors asking "What do I need to do?"

Volunteers tell them to look in the mail for a Medicare handbook called "Medicare & You" that explains all the changes. And they warn them not to make hasty decisions.

"Companies will say, 'It's urgent! Sign up now,' " Murphy said. "But you need to do the research to get the plan that's best for you."

By Oct. 13 the plans being pitched in Michigan will be on www.medicare.gov, along with a way to compare them. That includes the 17 companies offering standalone drug plans and nine companies offering Medicare Advantage plans.

Tuesday, October 4, 2005

Nurse arraigned on embezzlement, abuse charges

Trace Christenson

The Battle Creek Enquirer

MARSHALL — A former nursing home employee is charged today with embezzlement and patient abuse.

Lisa C. Coney, a licensed practical nurse, was arraigned Monday by Calhoun County District Court Judge John Holmes after her arrest by investigators from the Michigan Attorney General's office.

The 36-year-old Battle Creek woman is charged with one felony count of embezzlement of more than \$1,000 but less than \$20,000 and one misdemeanor count of patient abuse.

Coney could be sentenced up to five years in prison if convicted of embezzlement and up to a year in jail on the patient abuse charge.

She was released on a \$5,000 personal recognizance bond and ordered to return for a preliminary examination on Oct. 17.

In the complaint, Attorney General Mike Cox alleges that between July and November 2004, Coney falsified her work hours while working at Marshall Manor Health Care Service Inc. at 575 N. Madison St., adding 179.5 hours to her schedule and receiving \$4,532.38.

The charges also allege that on Dec. 1, 2004, Coney failed to safeguard an 81-year-old diabetic female resident who had returned to the home from the hospital.

Coney allegedly failed to intermittently check the woman's blood sugar level and the patient became unresponsive. She was returned to the hospital, where she died later that day, according to Cox.

Sherry Flynn, executive director of the nursing home, said Coney had been fired from her job when Flynn took over on April 25.

Flynn said she was aware of the investigation but knows little about the allegations.

Coney could not be reached for comment Monday evening.

"Our nursing and rehabilitation center takes pride in the commitment and genuine caring and love that the employees have for each of our residents," Flynn said Monday in a prepared statement. "We do a complete background check including criminal checks on all new employees and we also conduct abuse prevention training upon their hire and periodically throughout the year to ensure that our staff is aware of the signs and risk factors of potential abuse. Every precaution is taken to ensure the safety of our residents."

She said Marshall Manor is a 71-bed nursing and rehabilitation facility and employs 71 people.

Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.

Michigan Report

October 3, 2005

SUPPLEMENTAL AGENCY CALENDAR

The **Task Force on Elder Abuse** will meet Thursday, October 6 at 10 a.m. in Room L150, Cadillac Place, 3044 West Grand Boulevard, Detroit.

Tuesday, October 4, 2005

Winter heating bills to soar again Metro Detroit residents' rates expected to go up as MichCon, Consumers aim to offset natural gas costs.

By Nick Bunkley / The Detroit News

Most residents of Wayne and Washtenaw counties can expect to pay an average of \$66 more a month to heat their homes this winter than people who live in Detroit's northern suburbs. Michigan's two largest natural gas suppliers, Consumers Energy and Michigan Consolidated Gas Co., have asked state regulators for permission to raise rates in January to compensate for soaring natural gas prices.

MichCon, which serves homes and businesses generally south of Eight Mile, filed to increase its rate to \$1.31 per hundred cubic feet, nearly double the 66.2 cents charged last winter. An average customer's bill would rise to \$245 from \$140.

Consumers Energy, which serves Oakland and Macomb counties, filed to increase its rate to 91.1 cents per hundred cubic feet of gas, up from 62 cents last winter. The bill for an average customer would rise to \$179 from \$130.

The increases are expected to be approved by the Michigan Public Service Commission, which typically green-lights hikes that are needed to cover higher gas costs.

Consumers Energy and MichCon are required to charge exactly what they pay to buy the gas and cannot profit from the rate increase.

But that doesn't make the spike sting any less for consumers such as Jim McKeague, who moved this summer to a larger home in Brownstown Township from Redford Township. He was looking forward to turning on the natural gas fireplace in his living room but fears it might be too expensive.

With gasoline near \$3 a gallon and heating bills skyrocketing, McKeague, 55, figures he'll have to cut back on holiday spending.

"It's definitely going to take a chunk out of my livelihood," he said. "You can't spend any more money than you have."

Consumers Energy and MichCon have already raised rates several times this year as natural gas prices have soared along with other energy costs.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which disrupted oil and natural gas production in the Gulf of Mexico, have tightened supplies and driven prices even higher as winter approaches.

"All of those things have combined to make this a very difficult time to forecast what prices are going to be even a couple of months from now," said MichCon spokesman Len Singer. "This is probably the most volatile we've seen prices in any time in history."

Singer said the disparity between MichCon's and Consumers Energy's rates is at least partially the result of last winter's rates being set too low. Natural gas prices rose more than MichCon expected, so the company ended up losing money instead of breaking even.

MichCon and Consumers Energy have mitigated the effect of the hurricanes by buying most of the gas they expect to need this winter ahead of time and storing it in huge underground reservoirs.

"Michigan is always among the states with some of the lowest natural gas prices," said Michigan Public Service Commission spokeswoman Judy Palnau.

Utility officials urge customers who think they will have trouble paying their bills this winter to seek help as soon as possible.

Customers can call their utility to sign up for a program that spreads out their bills evenly throughout the year, eliminating spikes in the winter and drops in the summer, or apply for assistance from organizations such as The Heat and Warmth Fund.

"People with limited income are already struggling," said Kathy Walgren, executive director of THAW. "That's money that they maybe should be spending on groceries or medicine."

Metro Detroiters will also see the cost of electricity rise in January when a five-year rate freeze expires. For Detroit Edison customers, the increase is expected to be about 7 percent.

You can reach Nick Bunkley at (313) 222-2293 or nbunkley@detnews.com.

Energy Dept.: Use fuel wisely

Rising heat bills
increase need
for conservation

LSJ
1A
By ERIN KELLY 10/14

Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON —

With heating costs expected to skyrocket this winter, the federal government announced a national campaign Monday to let Americans know what they can do to reduce their monthly bills.

The Department of Energy is dispatching energy-efficiency experts to about 200 factories and government agencies to show them how to conserve. Top energy officials also will tour the country to spread the message to consumers.

"The need to use energy more wisely is particularly acute this year," Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman said because Hurricanes Katrina and Rita knocked out oil refineries and reduced the fuel supply.

The incentive is lower utility bills. The average U.S. household spends about \$1,300 a year on home energy costs — an amount expected to rise dramatically because of the hurricanes.

According to a report released in September by the Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration, prices for winter fuel oil, propane and natural gas will be more than 30 percent higher than last winter.

How you can save

- ▶ **Set your thermostat** as low as you comfortably can.
- ▶ **Install a programmable thermostat** that allows you to turn the heat down when you're gone and up shortly before you get home. (They range from about \$40 to more than \$100.)
- ▶ **Substitute compact fluorescent light bulbs** for incandescent bulbs.
- ▶ **Wash only full loads** of dishes and clothes.
- ▶ **Turn off your computer** when you're not using it.
- ▶ **Plug home electronics**, such as TVs and DVD players, into power strips. Then turn the strips off when the equipment is not being used.

Get tips online

- ▶ www.energysavers.gov, U.S. Department of Energy.
- ▶ www.ase.org/consumers, Alliance to Save Energy
- ▶ <http://hes.lbl.gov>, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California

Hunger Solution Center a new facility for feeding needy in Tri-Counties

Tony Lascari, Midland Daily News

10/04/2005

Hidden Harvest is growing in its efforts to serve Tri-County residents by redistributing food surpluses to organizations in need.

The 11-year-old organization has a new facility -- the Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Hunger Solution Center -- after years of planning with the East Side Soup Kitchen.

Hidden Harvest and the kitchen, which serves meals to about 300 people per day, will share the new 18,400-square-foot building in Saginaw.

Richard Premo, president and CEO of Hidden Harvest, said the facility is the base for delivering surplus food from the MidMichigan Medical Center, The Dow Chemical Co. corporate facility and other locations to agencies in need.

"We're taking these food products that otherwise would have been thrown out to food pantries and shelters," he said.

Shelterhouse, The Open Door, 1016 Treatment Centers, Pinecrest Farms, the Salvation Army and local food pantries are among those receiving aid in Midland, he said. Organizations in Saginaw and Bay counties are served as well.

Carol Campbell, MidMichigan Medical Center spokeswoman, said trucks come twice a week to take food from the hospital's kitchen.

"The Hidden Harvest program is an outstanding program and MidMichigan is pleased to have participated in it for the last several years," she said. "It is good to know that the food donated by the Medical Center stays in the Midland area to help various programs with their day-to-day needs."

The new building includes a warehouse, allowing Hidden Harvest to store food and consider the best options for distributing it in the Tri-Counties, Premo said. It also has a garage area, refrigerator and freezer storage, kitchen, dining area, offices and a meeting room.

"We're hoping we save some of these agencies money on buying food products," he said, adding that funds then could go toward other important services.

Church to give away food

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

BURTON

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, October 04, 2005

By George Jaksa gjaksa@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6332

BURTON - City of Hope Church, 5490 Davison Road, will give away 15,000 pounds of food from the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan from noon-3 p.m. - or while supplies last - Saturday in a distribution sponsored by the Samaritan Center, a church outreach program.

October 4, 2005

Helping at home: Local needs on the rise as winter and holidays approach

By Rick Charmoli, Cadillac News

CADILLAC - There are people who need assistance paying bills, finding shelter and help getting day-to-day items such as clothing and food.

While there are many who are displaced as a result of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, this is not the result of mother nature's devastation. It is what is happening here in the Cadillac area. With the holidays approaching, organizations such as the Northwest Gleaner's Food Bank, Salvation Army and Love INC are hoping the generosity of area residents toward the victims of the hurricanes does not leave them high and dry.

Laura Porter-Keller, manager at Northwest Gleaner's, said America's Second Harvest Network food banks, of which Gleaners is a part of, has been sending truckloads of relief aid to the Gulf Coast equaling about 600 truckloads.

While Porter-Kelley said there is a great need in the Gulf Coast and if food is needed for the Gulf Coast, they are ready to send it. She also said she has no idea what kind of impact it could have locally when it comes to meeting the needs in the area.

"It is hard to say. You would have to be a psychic to know what will happen. We have been well stocked throughout the summer. If they need it, the food is here. It just depends on what extent they need to draw from us," she said. "I'm not so worried as for what we have here as much as the donations that go to local pantries and churches. Because folks have donated to hurricane relief, food may not be there for the locals. That is a definite possibility."

Porter-Kelley said the northwest branch of the Gleaner's handles the needs of 10 counties, which include Wexford and Missaukee. She also said the branch puts out 30,000 to 35,000 pounds of food each week.

When it comes to meeting needs for hurricane relief, the Salvation Army is one of the lead agencies in that effort and Capt. Hope Burris said donations that come in right now are sent directly to the hurricane relief effort. The local chapter has collected about \$15,000 for hurricane relief.

Currently, Burris said the organization is fine when it comes to available food but it is a different story when it comes to monetary donations.

"We are good on food right now. We spent the last amount on FEMA money to help the program here. We take whatever is given to us but we could use monetary donations," Burris said. "We usually get donations that help fill Thanksgiving baskets and we are feeling the pinch right now. We usually try to help 200 families around Thanksgiving and I'm going to try and keep it at that number."

Likewise, Burris said for the Christmas holiday they try to help 300 families with baskets, which

include toys, and that too could be in jeopardy as a result of people giving to help with the hurricane relief effort.

Although there is concern over the baskets, Burris said the biggest concern looming over the Salvation Army is helping out residents and families when they come up short on utility bills.

"There are going to be a lot of things this winter. Heating costs will be atrocious and we are trying to figure out where we will get the extra money for that to help the people of Cadillac and Lake City," he said. "We were doing \$500 bills last year and probably \$600 or more this year."

Diane Wood also is concerned when it comes to helping families with paying utility bills.

Wood is the director of the organization locally and said she is confident that when the need arises, the people of the area will be ready to help.

"We find this community to be very giving and 99 percent of the time when we express a need it happens. Somebody comes through whether it is people who need clothing, diapers or need to have a wheelchair ramp built," she said. "We find very giving people in this community where we do have problems."

Wood said the organization, which helps get people in need in contact with people, churches or organization that can help, is already finding a tremendous amount of residents needing help paying utility bills and it will only get worse as fall turns to winter.

"Natural gas prediction is it is going to be 40 percent higher from a year ago. Propane has gone up and heating oil has gone up and everyone is struggling to pay bills," she said. "It is an across-the-board issue. What we really struggle with is how to help people who don't plan ahead and with higher costs it is harder to do this."

Homeless Prevention Coordinator for Northwest Michigan Human Services Suzanne Gaffney said right now there are no funds available to help pay utility bills because it is the end of the fiscal year.

"It is leaving us with nothing. Right now we don't have any funds to help with heating or utility bills. It is the end of the fiscal year and we ran out of money a few weeks ago," Gaffney said. "Personally, we talk about it affecting our own lives. We already have clients coming in and they are angry, scared and we are afraid of the wrath we will get at the front desk."

For information or to make a donation, call 779-0056 for the Northwest Gleaner's Food Bank; 775-7131 for the Salvation Army; 779-1888 for Love INC; or 775-9781 for the Northwest Michigan Human Services.

Genesee generosity fills warehouse for Katrina victims

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, October 04, 2005

By Ron Fonger rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317

FLINT - From sofas to ironing boards to dishes - so many local people gave so much to help Hurricane Katrina victims that there is no need to donate any more to a Genesee County warehouse.

"It's almost filled to the (brim)," Gary Alter, executive director of the Flint Jewish Federation, said of the 10,000-square-foot warehouse where items have been donated in recent weeks. The facility at the Great Lakes Technology Centre will remain open from 10 a.m.-7 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays to deliver goods to Katrina families who settled here. Volunteers, trucks and cash donations are still needed.

About 25 families have already received help in furnishing apartments and houses.

"This is the generosity of the Flint community," said Alter, who helped coordinate the warehouse on behalf of various local groups.

Don't forget local needs in wake of Katrina

The Kalamazoo Gazette

Tuesday, October 4, 2005

Southwest Michigan residents are digging deep into their pockets to help victims of Hurricane Katrina rebuild their lives.

Residents of Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, Cass and Allegan counties have contributed \$1.8 million, earmarked for Katrina relief, to the American Red Cross alone.

Now we urge local residents not to neglect local charities that take care of this area's needy.

If the experience after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks is any indication, we shouldn't be worried.

After the attacks, Americans donated heavily. This area alone gave \$725,000 to the American Red Cross after Sept. 11. But local charities reported no decline in local giving.

The Greater Kalamazoo United Way is expressing little worry that Hurricane Katrina will dampen this year's campaign to raise \$10.2 million.

Still, we'd like to remind area residents that local charitable needs remain.

Groups that work with the homeless and hungry, like the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission and Ministry With Community, often find demands on their services go up as winter sets in and those without roofs over their heads come in from the cold. Other organizations that work with low-income families will start gearing up for the extra help that their clients may need during the holidays.

Photos in newspapers and video on television of desperate people fleeing Katrina's violence and its aftermath have caused Americans to open their hearts and their wallets.

But it is important to remember the needy and helpless in our own backyard, and continue to give to the agencies that aid them.

Cox to appeal ruling on gay benefits

Detroit Free Press

October 1, 2005

Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox said Friday he will appeal a ruling earlier this week by an Ingham County judge that OK'd health care benefits for the gay and lesbian partners of public employees.

Cox spokeswoman Allison Pierce said Michigan voters had spoken clearly when they approved the one man-one woman marriage amendment to the state constitution last year. "We have an obligation to uphold their intent," she said.

Ingham County Judge Joyce Draganchuk sided with a coalition of employees, unions, activists and universities that argued that health care benefits for the same-sex partners of public employees are not marriage or marriagelike benefits.

Cox had been urged to seek an appeal by some backers of the amendment and by several Republican legislators.

By Dawson Bell

Senate to consider asking court to stop same-sex benefits

10/2/2005, 7:48 a.m. ET

By AMY F. BAILEY
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The state Senate is expected to take up two measures this week that would ask the Michigan Supreme Court to issue an order preventing state and local governments from providing benefits to the same-sex partners of their workers.

The resolutions were introduced after an Ingham County judge ruled that public universities and governments can provide health insurance to the partners of gay employees without violating the Michigan Constitution.

Ingham County Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk said the purpose of a 2004 constitutional amendment was to ban gay marriage and civil unions — not to keep public employers from offering benefits to gay employees.

The resolutions, introduced by Republican Sen. Alan Cropsey of DeWitt, would ask the state's highest court to issue a temporary restraining order to prevent the use of taxpayer money to fund benefits for homosexual unions until the court has ruled on its constitutionality.

A measure passed by Michigan voters last November made the union between a man and a woman the only agreement recognized as a marriage "or similar union for any purpose." Those six words led to a fight over benefits for gay couples.

Attorney General Mike Cox issued a legal opinion in March saying the measure prohibited the city of Kalamazoo from providing domestic partner benefits in future contracts. But 21 gay couples who work for Kalamazoo, universities and the state filed a lawsuit challenging Cox's interpretation.

Cox, a Republican, said he would appeal the judge's decision because "the people of Michigan spoke very clearly on the amendment," spokeswoman Alison Pierce said.

Also this week, the House Tax Policy Committee will take up a bill that would limit the amount of sales tax the state collects on fuel.

The legislation, introduced by Republican Rep. Robert Gosselin of Troy, would prohibit the sales tax from being charged on gas costing more than \$2.30 a gallon. The 6 percent sales tax would still apply to gas costing \$2.30 and less.

Gasoline prices in Michigan fell 20.4 cents per gallon in recent weeks, from a statewide average of \$2.91 to \$2.706, according to AAA Michigan. The average price fell 24.8 cents per gallon in greater Detroit, from \$2.883 to \$2.635 per gallon. Experts say gas prices may be heading higher, however.

Gosselin said the bill would help families save money at the pump.

"We can't control skyrocketing oil prices, but we can control taxes, and Michigan drivers don't deserve this burdensome sales tax at the pump," Gosselin said in a written statement.

But an analysis by the nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency said the legislation would mean little tax relief. If gas prices stayed at \$3 per gallon for a year, a taxpayer would save only about \$30 under the bill.

The sales tax on gasoline generates about \$840 million a year from the sale of 5 billion gallons. School officials worry the reducing the sales tax on gasoline above \$2.30 a gallon could hurt school funding, since about three-fourths of total sales tax revenue goes to the school aid budget that pays for K-12 public education.

Others say the tax break would be difficult to administer since a service station could be selling some grades of gasoline at less than \$2.30 a gallon and other grades above that price.

The same-sex benefits resolutions are SCR 33 and SR 68; the bill to cap the sales tax on gas is House Bill 4204.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

Same-sex benefits decision appealed

‘U’ says it will file amicus brief with appellate court to support benefits

By Jameel Naqvi, Daily News Editor

October 03, 2005

State Attorney General Mike Cox announced Friday he would appeal last week's ruling in favor of domestic partner benefits.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, which filed the lawsuit resulting in last Tuesday's ruling, has indicated it will fight attempts to overturn the decision.

The Ingham County Circuit Court ruling permits public institutions in the state to provide benefits such as health care to the same-sex partners of employees despite Michigan's constitution ban against same-sex marriages.

The University will continue to support the right of public employers to offer partner benefits. "We will be hopeful that the decision the lower court issued will be upheld," University spokeswoman Julie Peterson said.

The University, which issued an amicus brief to the circuit court in support of partner benefits, will file another amicus brief with an appellate court if permitted, Peterson added.

Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk's decision was based on her determination that health insurance is a benefit of employment, not marriage. She therefore ruled that providing such benefits does not amount to a recognition of marriage or a civil union, both of which are prohibited in multiple instances by state law, including a constitutional amendment approved by voters last year.

Besides Cox's appeal, Draganchuk's ruling also faces a challenge from two state Senate resolutions introduced by Sen. Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt) Thursday.

The resolutions call on the Michigan Supreme Court to issue a temporary restraining order preventing the state from providing partner benefits until the high court rules in the case.

But Liz Boyd, spokeswoman for Gov. Jennifer Granholm, said the governor would honor her earlier pledge of providing same-sex benefits to state employees in the event of a favorable decision, by presenting the Civil Service Commission with a provision of the state-employee contract granting same-sex benefits.

The state has presented the contract to the commission but has not yet presented the provision. The commission must approve the contract before it takes effect.

Boyd could not say whether Cox's decision to appeal the ruling would affect the implementation of the provision because she said she was unable to reach the state employer.

"We are not surprised (by Cox's action), but we expect to prevail in the appeal," she said.

The University continued to offer partner benefits to its employees even after Cox issued a nonbinding opinion in March, overturned by Tuesday's ruling. Cox's opinion stated that Kalamazoo's policy of offering partner benefits was not permitted under the new amendment to the state constitution.

Kalamazoo has said it would defer to last week's ruling, but it is unclear what the city will do after Cox's announcement. The city planned to stop providing partner benefits January before last Tuesday's decision was handed down.

A third potential challenge to last week's ruling comes from a pending appeal of a 2003 decision in favor of the Ann Arbor Public Schools' policy of providing same-sex benefits. A ruling in the case conflicting with the Ingham court's decision would provide an avenue to a higher court.